Lumber Camp Inspections

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UNTIL very recently, Maine, in common with most lumbering states that have depended upon remoteness to make lumber camps safe, had given little attention to the sanitary inspection of them. The condition continued, not because the health authorities were remiss, but from a lack of both inspection personnel and legislative authority. In 1931, two relatively small outbreaks of typhoid occurred almost simultaneously at separate camps of the same operator. Indeed, although never so proved and although the camps were located on separate watersheds, their close proximity indicated that the two outbreaks were in effect only one.

The moving incidents are fairly typical of under-regulated lumber camps, wherever located. In Camp Number 1, an open privy was distant only 100 feet from the building where the crew ate. Swarms of flies had easy access to both places. In Camp Number 2, in addition to the same hazards, there was the insanitary situation of a privy built on the bank of a stream above the pool from which the camp water supply was drawn. In accordance with the practice of the Bureau of Health, men of both crews were immunized, and the hazards ordered abated. Parenthetically, one man who had been infected remained a carrier for more than 4 years.

The department, or more definitely the Division of Sanitary Engineering to which was charged the supervision of lumber camps, moved to start routine inspections. It had long been established that such camps, if under only desultory inspection, were excellent culture ground for filth diseases. Still worse, since workmen were drawn from widely separated homes, the breakup of the camps at the end of the working season made the camps the best possible focal points for spreading the disease.

The procedure and experience of the Division of Sanitary Engineering may be interesting. A program of education of lumber operators was plainly indicated. Accordingly, there was called a conference of the division, with representative operators from the membership of the Timber Land Owners' Association. The necessity of adequate camp sanitation and the responsibility of camp operators for the public health were studied and carefully discussed.

The good will gained by the contacts made at this conference still persists, simplifying greatly the work of subsequent supervision, for the committee chosen from among the operators took over the task of extending the good will throughout the whole number of their organization. In that manner, generally by word of mouth, was carried out a campaign of education.

Moreover, this committee with the division's engineers developed a set of regulations agreeable to both the department and the members of the Timber Land Owners' Association. Presented by the joint committee to the Advisory Council of the Bureau of Health and Welfare, the regulations

reached formal approval on December 5, 1933. The 20 sections of regulations which have the force of law, provide for proper location and camp layout, water supply and handling, disposal of wastes, proper toilet and washing facilities, screening, dishwashing, the supply, handling and refrigeration of foods and milk, precaution against spread of infections and vermin, the manner of abandoning camp, provision for a caretaker, fixing responsibility for carrying out the provisions and finally fixing a nominal fine for failure to adhere to the rules.

The Division of Sanitary Engineering considers the program begun in 1931 well justified. During the year in which the Rules and Regulations became law, inspectors visited 143 camps which employed 4,647 men. Five typhoid carriers were found, either as cooks or cook's helpers, called cookees. These people were removed from camp, and typhoid immunization recommended. As a result, nearly 1,000 employees received anti-typhoid inoculations.

In the following year, the inspections showed that of the same number of camps with 5,184 employees, 86 had made substantial improvements in sanitary conditions.

The Division of Communicable Diseases of the Bureau of Health reports that no cases of typhoid fever have been traced to lumber camps since the enactment of definite regulations and the inauguration of routine inspections.

Birth Certificate

EIGHT-YEAR old Agnes was frequently sent home from school for forgetting to bring written excuses for tardiness or absence from classes. One day she was sent home to bring an important document, the birth certificate of her little brother Billy, who was just starting to go to school. Her mother handed her the certificate and cautioned her to take good care of the precious paper.

Agnes turned up at school crying.

"What's the matter now?" asked the teacher.

"I've lost Billy's excuse for being born!" she wailed.